

Austin woman, congregation honored Feb. 7

An Austin laywoman and an Austin congregation were honored Feb. 7 for exceptional outreach.

Ellen Balthazar, a member of Westlake UMC, Austin, received the 2004 Bishop's Exemplar Award for the Austin District.

Covenant UMC, Austin, earned the district's 2004 Innovation in Programming Award for its ministry with disabled residents at the Pecan Hill housing facility.

Both awards were presented at Tarrytown UMC, Austin, during the annual district laity celebration. More than 200 attended the awards luncheon.

Bishop Joel N. Martinez gives the Exemplar Award annually to laypeople selected by each district board of laity "for witness, commitment and service after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The 6-year-old Innovation in Programming Award, a traveling plaque, recognizes creative ministry initiatives

by local congregations.

Balthazar was cited for her enthusiastic leadership in local mission work. She has led the Westlake congregation into an ever-increasing number of outreach projects. Those include:

■ "Christmas in October," a time when Westlake members sign up for mission projects in the coming year. That ensures that mission work gets a high priority on personal calendars.

■ Interfaith Hospitality Network, which provides shelter in the new Westlake education building for homeless families.

■ Habitat for Humanity, which helps low-income families build homes.

■ Church Under the Bridge blanket collection for the homeless.

■ Back-to-school supplies for Montopolis Friendship Community Center, Austin.

In the community Balthazar volun-

teers with several organizations, serves on the Eanes Independent School District Board of Trustees and works as a creative marketing consultant for a variety of corporate clients.

Covenant UMC's ministry at Pecan Hill, a 24-unit housing facility with supportive services for the disabled, began last spring. A resident asked if the church would lead a Bible study there.

The weekly sessions draw 10 to 24 participants, including some who live elsewhere.

The outreach has grown into a seven-day-a-week fellowship ministry.

David Moore, a member of the Bible study team, helps residents daily make medical appointments, find physicians who accept Medicaid patients and locate money for bills or clothes. He also prays with people seeking support.

Others on the Covenant team carry on a well-developed transportation ministry with Pecan Hill residents.

Yoakum man recognized for service during Feb. 27 Victoria District event

Victoria District United Methodists honored a Yoakum layman Feb. 27 for dedicated service to church and community.

John J. Quast, a member of First UMC, Yoakum, received the 2004 Bishop's Exemplar Award for the Victoria District.

The award was presented during the Victoria District Celebration at the Yoakum Community Center. More than 400 people attended.

Along with Quast, 95 individuals and seven groups took home certificates for Christian outreach and service.

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Quast, 81, said he was deeply honored to receive the award.

"I thank Jesus Christ," he said. "I'm

so glad he put me on this earth to do all these things they said I did. I don't remember. Maybe that's why I'm so tired."

Quast was recognized for more than 25 years of service to the 268-member Yoakum congregation. During that tenure he served 16 years on the administrative board and 14 years on the board of trustees. He has also filled seats on the evangelism, fellowship, outreach, pastor-parish relations, parsonage and worship committees.

In the community Quast has delivered meals to the homebound, helped police with their Blue Santa program and served guests at the annual holiday community meal.

In the Victoria District Quast has served on the board of Cathedral Oaks Retreat Center near Weimar.

His community and church service has been honored before. Quast was named Yoakum Citizen of the Year in 1994.

McAllen District cites 2 laymen for witness

McAllen District United Methodists honored two laymen during February for exemplary discipleship.

Ben Martin, a member of First UMC, Kingsville, received the 2004 Bishop's Exemplar Award for the northern portion of the McAllen District Feb. 20 in Kingsville.

Stephen Crain, a member of First UMC, McAllen, was given the award for the southern portion of the district Feb. 21 in McAllen.

Forty-four other church members from 26 McAllen District congregations were recognized during the two events as laypeople of the year. Each one received a certificate of appreciation and a United Methodist cross-and-flame pin to mark their dedicated service to Christ and his church.

Total member count slips for 1st time since '93

For the first time since 1993, the Southwest Texas Conference recorded a net membership loss during 2003.

A preliminary membership report issued Feb. 10 showed 462 fewer United Methodists on the conference membership rolls as of Dec. 31 than the official count at the end of 2002. That's a 0.4 percent decrease.

Average weekly worship attendance dropped during 2003—for the second straight year—from 51,147 to 51,009, 0.27 percent slide.

The Rev. David A. Seilheimer, conference statistician, is to report official membership and worship-attendance numbers to the June 2-5 annual conference session in Corpus Christi.

The Rev. Harry G. Kahl, congregational growth director, called the preliminary 2003 attendance and worship numbers disappointing. He noted that total population in Southwest Texas continues to grow.

The 2003 membership decline comes after the conference set an all-time membership record in 2002 with 120,915. However, membership change has been relatively flat for three years.

District	Members	Change	Worship	Change
Austin	28,141	-40	12,311	+23
Corpus Christi	12,315	-665	5,316	-91
Kerrville	16,044	+487	6,743	+210
McAllen	8,492	-141	4,397	-38
San Angelo	8,261	-127	3,033	-74
San Antonio	37,008	+28	15,753	-111
Victoria	10,192	-4	3,456	-57
TOTAL:	120,453	-462	51,009	-138

Average weekly worship attendance had climbed steadily between 1993 and 2001.

Only two of the seven districts—Kerrville and San Antonio—showed net membership increases in the 2003 preliminary report. Only the Austin and Kerrville districts registered gains in average weekly worship attendance.

Of the 350 congregations listed in the preliminary report, 158—or 45 percent—recorded net membership increases during 2003. Only 148—or 42 percent—averaged more people in worship last year.

Northern Hills UMC, San Antonio,

listed the biggest net membership gain for 2003—191. Its membership climbed to 1,364.

The year-old Pedernales River UMC, Spricewood, experienced the largest gain in average weekly worship attendance—up from 0 to 125. First UMC, Kerrville, showed the large worship attendance increase among established congregations—up 93 to 911.

The number of congregations with 1,000 or more members increased from 26 to 30 during 2003. Those 30 congregations are home to 51,443 members—or 42.7 percent of all Southwest Texas United Methodists.

Goliad couple receives Exemplar Award for humble service

A Goliad couple was honored Feb. 18 in Kenedy for humbly serving the Lord in everything the two do.

Jesse and Carol Davis, members of First UMC, Goliad, received the 2004 Bishop's Exemplar Award for the northern "Brush Country" portion of the Corpus Christi District.

Thirty-six other individuals from 15 congregations were given certificates during the 8th annual Brush Country discipleship celebration for distinguished discipleship.

More than 220 people from 20 congregations between San Antonio and Corpus Christi witnessed the presentations at the Kenedy City Auditorium.

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ment and service after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"This is a complete surprise," Carol Davis said. "I can't believe anyone would get an award like this. I appreciate it very much. All I do is for the Lord."

Her husband echoed her surprise.

"This (award) is beyond my recognition, really," he said. "But what I do I do for the Lord."

The Davises were honored for being "one of the hardest working duos the United Methodist Church could ever wish for."

Both are members of the church choir and provide special music for worship, fellowship events and revivals. Mr. Davis plays the guitar. Mrs. Davis plays the piano.

Mr. Davis is a founding member of the church's men's chorus.

Mrs. Davis directs the children's choir and chimes choir. She teaches music and worship skills to children in the weekly Logos after-school ministry.

Mr. Davis is co-chair of the finance committee for the 168-member Goliad congregation. He has also chaired the church council and been a member of many committees, including the board of trustees.

Mrs. Davis helped with the congregation's recent 40 Days of Purpose study, has coordinated numerous mission activities, is a Logos table parent and is a founding member of the prayer chain.

The Davises operate the congregation's tape ministry and regularly visit sick and homebound members. They have delivered food baskets to shut-ins and serve on the board of Goliad County Outreach.